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Beyond valence in customer dissatisfaction: A review and new findings on behavioral responses to regret and disappointment in failed services

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Abstract

Dissatisfied customers may express their dissatisfaction behaviorally. These behavioral responses may impact the firms' profitability. How do we model the impact of emotions on satisfaction and subsequent customer behaviors? There are essentially two approaches: the valence-based approach and the specific emotions approach. The authors indicate theoretically and show empirically that it matters to distinguish these approaches in services research. Dissatisfaction and the specific emotions disappointment and regret were assessed and their influence on customers' behavioral responses (complaining, switching, word-of-mouth, and customer inertia) was examined, using a sample of over 900 customers. It was found that emotions have a direct impact on behavior, over and above the effects of dissatisfaction. Hence, the authors argue against incorporating emotions such as regret and disappointment into a general (dis)satisfaction measure (i.e., the valence-based approach), and in favor of a specific emotions approach to customer dissatisfaction. Implications for services marketing practice and theory are discussed.

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Keywords: Customer dissatisfaction; Valence-based approach; Behavioral response; Emotions

1. Introduction

Service encounters can be a source of negative emotions. These emotions may occur, for example, when the delivery of a service does not match up to previously held expectations. But even when expectations are met, customers can experience negative affect. This could be the case when customers realize that the obtained delivery would have been better had they opted for an alternative service or service provider (Inman et al., 1997; Taylor, 1997). Obviously, the positive and negative emotions experienced in these situations will influence the overall degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service (Herrmann et al., 1999a,b; Maute and Dubé, 1999; Stephens and Gwinner, 1998; Tsiros, 1998; Westbrook, 1980; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991; Zeelenberg and Pieters, 1999). Most likely, these specific emotions will also partly determine the subsequent behavior in relation to the service and service provider, such as the likelihood of complaining, the degree to which customers will switch or repurchase, and the extent of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication they

will engage in. This assumed influence on customer behavior could occur via overall (dis)satisfaction, but might also stem directly from the specific emotions themselves. This brings us to the central question of this article, namely: How do we model the impact of specific emotions on satisfaction and subsequent customer behaviors? Based on the recent review of the literature on emotion and consumer behavior by Bagozzi et al. (2000), we argue that there are essentially two ways to model the interactions between emotions and satisfaction (and satisfaction-related behaviors), namely, the valence-based approach and the specific emotions approach. We indicate theoretically and show empirically that it matters to distinguish these approaches in services research.

1.1. The valence-based approach

The first approach to modeling the impact of emotions on satisfaction, the valence-based approach, entails a summation of the positivity and negativity of the different emotions that customers experience to arrive at an overall judgment of (dis)satisfaction. In the valence-based approach, negative emotions are expected to lead to more dissatisfaction, whereas positive emotions are expected to lead to more

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satisfaction. The net (weighted) valence of the affective experience then is the balance between positive and negative emotions. The behaviors that follow are then supposed to be fully driven by this overall positivity or negativity. The main advantage of the valence-based approach is its parsimony. It allows for combining all sorts of emotions and other constructs to be expressed in one single currency, namely, customer (dis)satisfaction. However, at the same time, the focus on mere valence has the disadvantage of ignoring all the specific elements that are present in the different emotions, which are not easily expressed by valence alone.

1.2. *The specific emotions approach*

The alternative approach that we like to plea for in this article, the specific emotions approach, goes beyond mere valence and focuses on the idiosyncratic elements of specific emotions (e.g., DeSteno et al., 2000; Keltner and Lerner, 2000; Raghunathan and Pham, 1999; van der Pligt et al., 1998; Zeelenberg et al., 1998). Hence, it requires insight into the specific antecedents, phenomenology, and consequences of different emotions. According to this approach, different negative emotions may differentially impact (dis)satisfaction. For example, the negative emotion disappointment (stemming from outcomes that do not match up to previously held expectations) is expected to affect dissatisfaction very strongly, whereas it is not yet clear whether, for example, the negative emotion shame (experienced when one judges oneself to be a bad person) should have any influence on satisfaction. More importantly, as research in the field of emotion theory has shown, different specific emotions can have different behavioral tendencies (action tendencies or patterns of action readiness) and behavioral consequences (e.g., Frijda and Zeelenberg, 2001; Frijda et al., 1989; Roseman et al., 1994). These findings have important implications for services research. The interest of this field in customer satisfaction is mainly due to the effects it has on customer behaviors that are relevant for the firm. The specificity of the impact of emotions on behavioral responses implies that knowledge of dissatisfaction alone may not be very informative to predict and explain the specific behavior customers will engage in. A focus on emotion specific influences may offer improved insight.

The specific emotion approach leans heavily on the appraisal theory of emotions (see, for a contemporary review, Scherer et al., 2001; see also Bagozzi et al., 1999). One of the tenets of appraisal theory is that the cognitive appraisal of the situation is the ruling mechanism in both the elicitation and the differentiation of emotion. For that reason, most emotion theorists regard appraisals as a key component of emotional experience. In addition to their specific appraisal patterns, specific emotions also differ with respect to the accompanying phenomenologies (e.g., Frijda et al., 1989; Roseman et al., 1996). Consequently, specific emotions carry distinctive information about one's position in the world, and signal one's current status with respect to the relevant concerns and

goals (Frijda, 1986). Thus, specific emotions are responses to specific situations (or better, appraisals of these), which makes it likely that specific emotions produce a whole repertoire of different specific behaviors aimed at restoring the disturbed relationship with the situation as signaled by the specific emotion. These behaviors may vary from fighting in the case of anger, via flighting in the case of fear, to inertia in the case of sadness. Thus, focussing on only customer dissatisfaction to measure the negative evaluation of a service, as in done in valence-based approaches, may be useful in capturing the possible differences in satisfaction produced by different emotions. But the valence approach is likely to produce insufficient information when one is interested in the specific behaviors customers are likely to engage in following this aversive experience. Will the customer complain, switch to another service provider, engage in negative WOM, or will the customer refrain from any action? Valence-based approaches predict that customers are more likely to engage in all of these behaviors as their evaluation of the service gets worse. However, the specific emotions approach, by acknowledging the idiosyncratic appraisals and phenomenologies of each emotion, may help us to better understand and predict the specific behaviors the customer engage in.

Summarizing, the impact of emotions on (dis)satisfaction and (dis)satisfaction-related behaviors can be modeled by summing up the overall positivity and negativity of the different emotional experiences, as in done in valence-based approaches. Alternatively, we propose that (dis)satisfaction and its related behaviors are better understood by using a specific emotion approach, in which different emotions, with the same valence, may have idiosyncratic effects.

Section 2 will conceptualize the specific emotions that are the focus of our research: disappointment and regret. Then, the impact of these two emotions on customer (dis)satisfaction and the related recent developments in the customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction literature are discussed. This is followed by a description of the conceptual model underlying the current research. As a guide for the remainder of this article, the conceptual model (adopted from Zeelenberg and Pieters, 1999) is depicted in Fig. 1.

2. Regret and disappointment: same valence, different specifics

In order to pit the valence-based approach against the specific emotions approach, we focus on the effects of two emotions that have the same valence (i.e., negative), but nevertheless differ in their specific phenomenologies: namely, the emotions regret and disappointment. Before describing the specifics of both emotions in some detail, we will explain our reasons for selecting specifically these two emotions.

The first reason is that regret and disappointment play an important role in customer decision-making processes (e.g.,

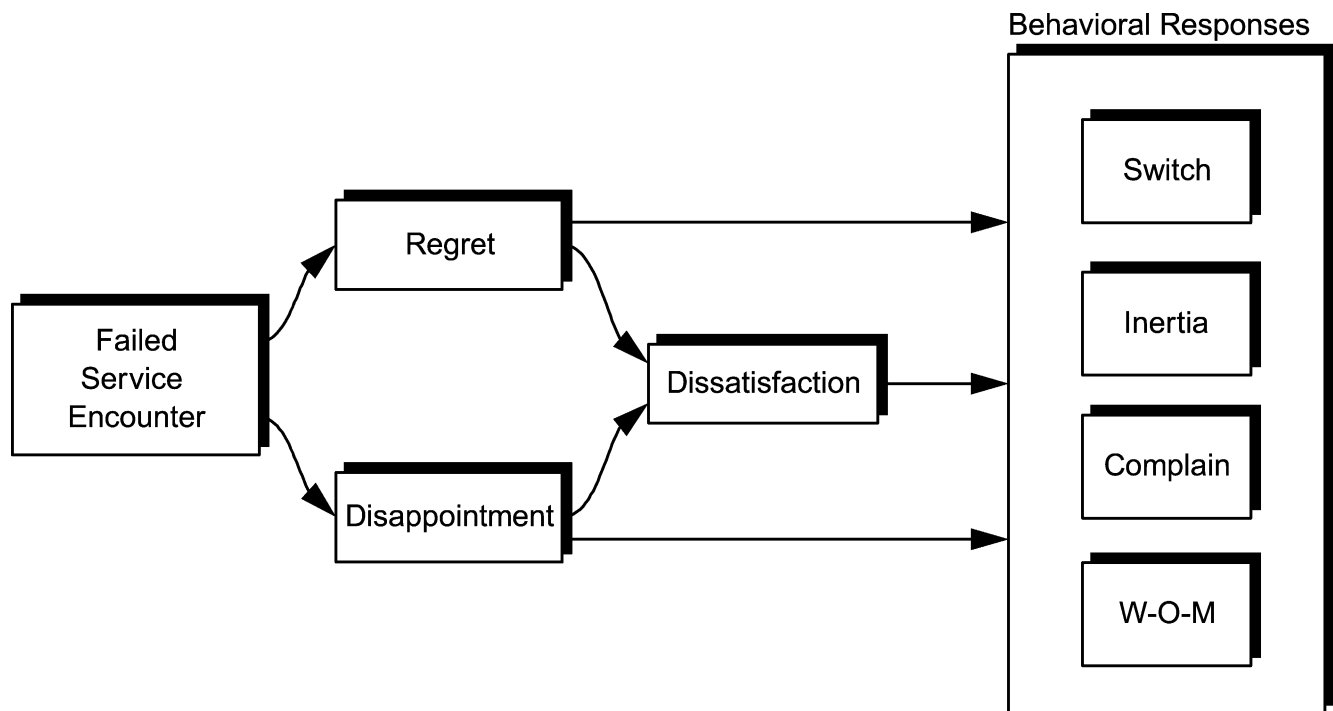


Fig. 1. Behavioral responses to failed service encounters.

Cooke et al., 2001; Creyer and Ross, 1999; Hetts et al., 2000; Inman and McAlister, 1994; McConnell et al., 2000; Simonson, 1992). Moreover, recent research and theorizing in marketing stressed the role of regret, and to a lesser extent that of disappointment, in satisfaction and satisfaction-related behaviors (Herrmann et al., 1999a,b; Inman et al., 1997; Taylor, 1997; Tsiros and Mittal, 2000; Zeelenberg and Pieters, 1999; Zeelenberg et al., 2001). Generally, it can be said that regret and disappointment are the result of bad decisions and disconfirmed expectancies (cf., Zeelenberg et al., 2000). Note that in our approach, negative disconfirmation is the antecedent condition of the emotion disappointment, which is consistent with recent developments in emotion theory (e.g., van Dijk and van der Pligt, 1997). We further assume that disappointment mediates between negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction. This may partly explain why the relationship between disconfirmation and dissatisfaction is sometimes weak. Disappointment is felt when actual service delivery violates prior held expectations, whereas regret is typically felt following a bad choice of service provider (i.e., when it turns out that a foregone provider would have delivered a better service). Of course, we acknowledge the existence of important other negative emotions that may be experienced as well during or following service encounters. Examples of these are anger, shame, disgust, embarrassment, and sadness (e.g., Machleit and Eroglu, 2000; Lassar et al., 1998; Oliver, 1993; Westbrook, 1980; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991). They are either related to the social interaction during service delivery (e.g., anger, embarrassment), or may be secondary emotions in the sense that they follow up on the disappointment or regret

experienced directly in response to the obtained service delivery (e.g., disgust or sadness) (Levine, 1996). Despite their significance and frequent occurrence, these other emotions are beyond the scope of the present paper. Recall that our aim is to pit the valence-based approach against the specific emotions approach in modeling the impact of these specific emotions on satisfaction and subsequent behaviors. A focus on the related emotions, regret and disappointment, serves that goal. Yet we understand that a complete understanding of the role of specific emotions in customer satisfaction requires a more elaborate sample of emotions.

A second reason for selecting specifically these emotions is that, besides their valence, regret and disappointment share a number of other important features. Both emotions are related to the process of decision making and uncertainty with respect to the outcomes that can be obtained. Also, both emotions originate in counterfactual thinking, a comparison process in which the obtained outcome is compared to an outcome that was expected (disappointment) or might have occurred (regret). The current focus on regret and disappointment therefore extends previous research within the evolving emotion specificity tradition, since previous tests of this approach used emotions that were often much more different from each other, such as fear and anger, or sadness and anger (DeSteno et al., 2000; Keltner and Lerner, 2000; Raghunathan and Pham, 1999). Thus, the similarity of the emotions used in the present study, regret and disappointment, provides a more conservative test of the specific emotion approach. If we find specific effects of regret and disappointment, this would provide strong support for the specific emotions approach.

The third reason for selecting specifically these emotions is that our own program of research has produced insight into the specifics of regret and disappointment. We have found differences in antecedent conditions, appraisal patterns, phenomenologies, and consequences. The research leading to this knowledge is reviewed in detail in Zeelenberg et al. (2000). It shows that regret and disappointment are related, though different specific emotions. Regret stems from wrong decisions and is typically associated with self-blame. Disappointment stems from disconfirmed expectancies and is typically associated with blaming others or circumstances. Their relevance for customer decision processes and postpurchase evaluations requires marketing theorists to understand the behavioral effects of these specific emotions. The fact that regret and disappointment have clearly separable appraisal patterns and distinct phenomenologies made us suspect that their impact on behavior may go beyond valence.

3. Disappointment, regret, and satisfaction

Several recent studies have tried to integrate regret into the more traditional expectancy disconfirmation paradigm (see, for an overview, Oliver, 1997). Most relevant here are two recent publications showing that customer dissatisfaction is not only a function of disappointment (i.e., the amount of negative disconfirmation), but also of regret (i.e., the performance of forgone alternatives) (Inman et al., 1997; Taylor, 1997). As argued above, customers experience regret upon realizing that they would have obtained a better delivery had they opted for another service provider. Inman et al. (1997) simulated such regret experiences in a controlled experiment in which participants made choices between lottery pairs. Participants received outcome feedback for each choice and their evaluation of each decision was assessed. The analyses showed that both the obtained, as well as the missed outcome (because a nonchosen option won) had significant effects on participants' evaluation of their decisions. When the effects of the forgone alternatives were excluded from the analysis, the amount of variance accounted for in participants' evaluation of their decisions dropped significantly. Taylor (1997) provided additional support of the impact of regret on (dis)satisfaction. She found in two studies on satisfaction with movies that, in addition to expectancy disconfirmation about the chosen movie, the expected quality of nonchosen movies (i.e., a proxy for regret) influenced satisfaction with the chosen movie. Specifically, the higher the expected quality of the nonchosen movies, the lower the satisfaction with the chosen movie. These findings have been replicated in other studies (Herrmann et al., 1999a,b; Tsiros, 1998; Tsiros and Mittal, 2000).

Hence, both studies found regret to be a significant determinant of consumers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Although these findings are important, we argue that the effects of specific emotions such as regret on consumer

behavior are not only captured by the overall valence, i.e., (dis)satisfaction, but are idiosyncratic as well. Below we describe why such effects are important and how the specific emotions approach may lead to differentiated predictions for the different negative emotions, whereas the valence-based approach would lead to predicting similar effects for both regret and disappointment.

4. A conceptual model for the effects of disappointment and regret in services

The model depicted in Fig. 1 summarizes our conceptualization of the role of the specific emotions, disappointment and regret, on customers' dissatisfaction and their associated behavioral reactions. The appraisal of a failed service encounter produces specific emotional reactions, in the present case regret and/or disappointment. As in valence-based approaches, we expect that these emotions have an effect on customers' dissatisfaction, which in turn influences behavioral responses. However, and this is not accounted for in valence-based approaches, we expect that disappointment and regret have effects on behavioral responses as well.

4.1. Behavioral responses to failed service encounters

In our study we focus on the three behavioral responses to dissatisfaction that dominate the customer satisfaction literature: switching, complaining, and WOM communication (e.g., Richins, 1987; Oliver, 1997; Zeithaml et al., 1996). We add a new dependent variable in this study that has received virtually no attention to date and which we will show to be relevant. This is a response called *inertia*—doing nothing in response to a failed service encounter. This behavioral response was added since often customers just do not react at all when a bad thing happens, and this might be related to emotional experiences. It is a characteristic of some emotions that they may result in a loss of motivation, that is, inertia (Frijda, 1986). Below we will illustrate these different behaviors and their relation with regret and disappointment.

4.2. Switching

Switching refers to the termination of a relationship with the service provider. This termination may either be followed by initiating a relationship with another service provider, by performing the service yourself, or refraining from the service altogether. Ample research has shown that dissatisfied consumers are more likely to switch than satisfied customers (e.g., Loveman, 1998; Rust and Sahorik, 1993; Solnick and Hemenway, 1992). We expect a positive relation between regret and switching. As we argued earlier, regret stems from “wrong decisions,” implying that there would have been a better alternative. If that is the case, it is likely that customers opt for this

better alternative when they are again confronted with a similar situation. One may also expect a relation between disappointment and switching, since one way to cope with this disappointment is to get away from the situation (refrain from the service altogether) or try to do better next time (initiate a relationship with another service provider or performing the service yourself). But it seems likely that this relation between disappointment and switching only applies to situations in which the customer did not consider alternatives when choosing for the service provider. When the customer had considered alternatives and the choice turned out badly, it seems likely that the switching would be a function of regret (see also [Herrmann et al., 1999a](#)).

4.3. *Complaining*

Complaining occurs when customers communicate their discontent explicitly to the firm or to a third party, such as a consumer union or a government body. [Singh \(1988\)](#) and [Maute and Forrester \(1993\)](#), amongst others, found that dissatisfaction leads customers to complain. We expect a relation between disappointment and complaining, but not between regret and complaining. Disappointment is felt in cases where the service expectations are violated and the provider is held responsible for it. Hence, it makes sense to complain. In cases of regret, one typically feels responsible for the bad experience and complaining does not seem appropriate.

4.4. *WOM*

WOM communication covers all communications of customers with the members of their social and professional network ([Anderson, 1998](#)). It is usually expressed by talking or e-mailing to family members, friends, relatives, colleagues, and so forth. Although WOM may be the result of both satisfaction (positive WOM) and dissatisfaction (negative WOM), we only focus on the latter form. What effects can we expect for the different emotions? Here it may be illustrative to focus on the various roles that WOM can serve for the customer: WOM has an emotion-coping function for the customer, namely, that of venting one's discontent and gaining sympathy from others. The venting may apply to regret and disappointment cases. Yet, disappointed customers may, in addition, try to get sympathy through WOM. Regretful customers are likely to feel responsible for the bad service experience ("I should have known better."), and hence may not expect to gain sympathy from others. WOM also has a more general social interaction function as well. Communicating about one's positive and negative experiences and emotions is common, even if customers hold themselves responsible ("Listen to how stupid I was."). The recommendation function of WOM has been emphasized most often. Customers may want to warn others about bad service

providers, which could apply to both regret and disappointment cases. In view of this, we expect both regret and disappointment to impact on WOM.

4.5. *Inertia*

Inertia seems to be a relevant behavioral response for both regret and disappointment. Many times in the case of failed service encounters, customers do not react at all, or they experience a lack of behavioral action in response to the failure. Hence, we define inertia as the experienced absence of goal-directed behavior. It is important to realize that inertia is not picked up by the traditional satisfaction-related behaviors. For example, customer loyalty in practice is sometimes measured by merely examining the sheer percentage of returning customers. There is a danger in this when a significant proportion of the returning customers is dissatisfied but does not do anything yet. When sufficient alternatives arise or the level of disappointment rises, they may suddenly switch ([Oliver, 1997](#)). Therefore, we examined customer inertia after a failed service in more detail. However, it is not yet clear which relations to expect with regret and disappointment. On the basis of our own research on the psychology of these emotions, we concluded that "regret is likely to result in a focus on nonattained goals and promote goal persistence; disappointment may result in goal abandonment" ([Zeelenberg et al., 2000, p. 528](#)). This conclusion refers to the motivational consequences of regret and disappointment, and it of course depends on the specifics of the situation whether these motivations produce active behaviors or just inaction. In general, though, it would result in the prediction that disappointment, more than regret, would be associated with inertia. However, according to [Landman \(1993, p. 9\)](#), "regret arouses discomfort with inferiority and passivity. A person with regrets is putatively passively thinking things over and feeling bad." Thus, since both regret and disappointment have been linked to inertia, we have no clear predictions for the effects of these emotions on this behavioral response.

It may seem odd to include inertia as a measure of behavioral response. It could be argued that the lack of action that is expressed by this measure should show a direct negative relation with all the other behavioral responses. Engaging in one of the more traditional responses, so it seems, would automatically rule out inertia. One cannot be active and inactive at the same time. It needs to be noted, however, that the behavioral responses in which marketers are interested may not be perceived as behavioral action by the customer. For example, when customers engage in WOM, they may interpret this as action towards the service provider ("I'll tell all my friends about him, and ruin his business."), but they may also perceive this as a mere act of letting off steam ("Oh man, listen what happened to me."). Importantly, in this second instance, the customer may experience inertia because he did not act directly towards the service provider. Since this is a first inquiry into inertia

as a response to failed service encounters, we will also study the relation between the more traditional behavioral responses and inertia.

Recently we reported on a first test of some of these ideas (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 1999). In that research, we only focused on switching, complaining, and WOM as functions of regret, disappointment, and satisfaction. We did not yet include a measure of inertia. In short, our results were as follows. In Study 1, using a vignette methodology, we found that regret was more associated with switching behavior than was disappointment, and that disappointment was more associated with WOM and complaining than was regret. These results were largely replicated in a second study in which participants were asked to report an autobiographical episode in which they experienced dissatisfaction with a service. Regret had an effect on customers' switching, over and above the effect that dissatisfaction had on switching. Disappointment had an effect on WOM, over and above the effect of dissatisfaction. Finally, neither regret nor disappointment had an effect on the actual complaining in Study 2.

These first findings are hopeful, yet they suffer from a number of shortcomings. First of all, we did not find an effect of regret on dissatisfaction, and thus failed to replicate the findings by, amongst others, Inman et al. (1997) and Taylor (1997). It is not clear how the absence of an effect of regret on satisfaction may have amplified or attenuated the effects of regret on the behavioral responses. Second, we used single items to measure regret and disappointment. Even though the results obtained supported most hypotheses, the measurement unreliability introduced by single items may have attenuated some relationships (e.g., the relation between regret and dissatisfaction and the relation between the emotions and complaining). Third, the earlier studies had relatively small sample sizes and this may also have contributed to not finding true effects. Fourth, the participants in these earlier studies were all Tilburg University undergraduate students in business administration. It is possible that the experiences of this homogeneous group of young educated people are not quite representative of the population of failed service encounters, and that this selectivity may have obscured some of the relationships between the dependent variables. Fifth, previous research in general has paid little attention to consumers' inertia in response to failed service encounters.

Summarizing, in the present article we will test for the behavioral effects of the specific emotions, regret and disappointment, experienced after a failed service encounter. First of all, we expect that both regret and disappointment have an effect on customer dissatisfaction and that dissatisfaction influences the behavioral responses. In addition to that, we expect both regret and disappointment to influence WOM communication. Both emotions may also have an effect on inertia. Finding such effects would support the importance of accounting for specific emotions in general. But a stronger case would be made if differential effects of regret and disappointment are found. We expect such effects

for switching and complaining. Specifically, we predict regret to have an effect on the tendency to switch service providers, and disappointment to have an effect on complaining. In effort to maximize external validity, these predictions were tested in a field study in which a large representative sample of the Dutch population was asked about negative experiences with services.

5. Method

In the present study we asked customers to recall a personal experience with a dissatisfying service delivery. We asked them specifically about a regretful experience, since we expected regretful customers to feel disappointment as well, whereas the reverse would not be necessary for disappointed customers. Next, the customers were asked questions about their feelings and behaviors in response to this encounter. Our procedure shows some similarities with that of critical incidents research, but there are important differences. In critical incidents research, the autobiographical episodes are focused upon; while in the present research, the experiential qualities of these episodes are central. These can be measured by response scales that are subjected to standard testing, which is an advantage. Also, in critical incidents, only *extreme* (critical) incidents are examined; while in the present procedure, experiences of all intensity can be collected.

5.1. Participants

Participants were members of the *CentER-Data Telepanel*. Members of the Telepanel have been provided with a personal computer and a modem at home. Questionnaires are sent to the panel members by modem, completed during the weekend, and returned to CentER-Data by modem again. The sample is representative for the Dutch population and consists of about 2300 people of 18 years and older. In total, 961 members of the Telepanel participated in the present study. Average age of the participants is 47.3 years, 23.7% has a college degree or higher, 54% is female.

5.2. Questions

After the participants had recalled an experience, they were asked a number of questions to assess their thoughts, feelings, and actions in relation to the experience. The specific emotions, regret and disappointment, were each measured with two items—one tapping the core feeling component, the other tapping the appraisal of the main antecedent condition. The *regret* measure (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.937$) consisted of the questions: "After this experience, how much regret did you feel over your choice?" (answered on a seven-point scale with endpoints labeled *none* [1] and *very much* [7]), and "In retrospect, how bad do

you judge your decision to opt for this service provider?" (*not at all bad* [1] and *very bad* [7]). The *disappointment* measure ($\alpha=0.882$) consisted of the questions: "After this experience, how much disappointment did you feel about the delivery of the service?" (*none* [1] and *very much* [7]), and "To what extent was the delivery of the service worse than you expected beforehand?" (*not at all worse* [1] and *much more worse* [7]). The *dissatisfaction* measure ($\alpha=0.908$) consisted of the questions: "Overall, how dissatisfied were you with the delivery of the service?" (*not at all dissatisfied* [1] and *very much dissatisfied* [7]), and "Overall, how good or bad did you feel after this experience?" (*good* [1] and *bad* [7]).

Next, the four different behavioral responses are measured. These measures were partly adopted from Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Zeelenberg and Pieters (1999). Four items assessed *complaining* ($\alpha=0.746$): "I have complained to external agencies, such as the consumer union, about the service provider," "I have complained to employees of the service provider," "I have filed written complaint," and "I have complained directly to other customers about the service provider." Three items assessed *WOM communication* ($\alpha=0.878$): "I have talked with friends and acquaintances about this experience," "I have talked with my partner and/or relatives about this experience," and "I have discouraged others to use this service provider." Three items measured *switching* ($\alpha=0.730$): "I have used the services of this service provider less than before," "I have started to perform the service myself (or will do so)," and "I have switched to a competing service provider." Two items assessed *inertia* ($\alpha=0.737$): "I remained passive" and "I did not take action." For all items, the participants indicated the extent to which they engaged in each specific behavior, on seven-point scales with endpoints labeled *not at all* [1] and *to a very large extent* [7].

6. Results

On average, customers were somewhat dissatisfied ($M=3.80$), regretful ($M=3.74$), and disappointed ($M=3.89$) concerning the failed service. The mean scores

on the four behavioral responses are as follows: switching $M=2.75$, inertia $M=2.82$, complain $M=1.95$, and WOM $M=3.32$.

We first regressed the experienced dissatisfaction on disappointment and regret to test whether both specific emotions were independent of influence. This was the case. Jointly, regret and disappointment accounted for 87.7% of the variance in dissatisfaction [$F(2,958)=3405$, $P<.001$]. Both regret (coefficient=.381, $t=13.379$, $P<.001$) and disappointment (coefficient=.574, $t=20.151$, $P<.001$) had a significant impact on dissatisfaction. This supports our prediction that both specific emotions are important determinants of dissatisfaction and should be accounted for. It also replicates the findings, initially reported by Inman et al. (1997) and Taylor (1997), in a less controlled, more ecologically valid setting.

Next, we performed *multivariate multiple regression analysis* using the program Stata (StataCorp, 1999). In the multivariate multiple regression analysis, the four behavioral responses were regressed *simultaneously* on dissatisfaction, disappointment, and regret. The individual regression coefficients and standard errors are identical to those that would be obtained when each of the four behavioral responses would be regressed separately on the predictors. However, the important advantage over running four separate multiple regression analyses is that multivariate multiple regression also estimates the between-equation covariances. This allows us to directly test the coefficients of dissatisfaction, regret, and disappointment across the four equations, which is a desirable feature to test our predictions. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

The general pattern of results is close to our predictions. Across all four behavioral responses, the influence of both regret and disappointment was highly significant (at $P<.001$) as shown by the across-equation F test in Table 1. Moreover, a substantial amount of variance in each behavioral response is accounted for. In the following, we will first discuss the results for the behavioral responses. Next, we elaborate on the results for inertia because of the specific nature of this response, as indicated in the Introduction.

As expected, dissatisfaction influenced all three traditional behavioral responses significantly. The more custom-

Table 1
Impact of dissatisfaction, regret, and disappointment on behavioral responses to failed service encounter

	Switching		Inertia		Complain		Word of mouth		Across-equation test of significance	
	β	P value	β	P value	β	P value	β	P value	F test	P value
Dissatisfaction	0.210 (0.063)	.001	0.068 (0.086)	.429	0.287 (0.080)	<.001	0.375 (0.049)	<.001	15.66	<.001
Regret	0.210 (0.060)	.001	0.180 (0.082)	.029	-0.134 (0.076)	.079	0.208 (0.047)	<.001	11.84	<.001
Disappointment	0.331 (0.066)	<.001	0.126 (0.090)	.163	0.361 (0.083)	<.001	0.285 (0.051)	<.001	13.39	<.001
R^2	.536		.133		.264		.713			
F value	368.30	<.001	48.83	<.001	114.28	<.001	791.73	<.001		

df values are 3958 for regression and 4958 for across-equation tests. β values are standardized regression weights; standard errors in parentheses.

ers are dissatisfied, the more they are inclined to switch, complain, and talk about their dissatisfaction with others. Unexpectedly, there was no effect of dissatisfaction on inertia. More interestingly, regret promoted switching, inertia, and WOM, while controlling for the influence of dissatisfaction and disappointment. This supports our predictions. Also as we predicted, regret did not influence complaining significantly. Disappointment influenced all three traditional behavioral responses, while controlling for the influence of dissatisfaction and regret. But disappointment did not influence inertia. Let us now turn to the results for inertia in somewhat more detail.

In a follow-up analysis, we also regressed inertia on the three *other* behavioral responses. If consumers would consider these three behavioral responses when indicating their level of inertia, the three would have a significant and negative influence on inertia (more of the behavioral response would equal less inertia). However, we found a very different, though interesting, pattern of results. Complaining was the only behavioral response that had the expected negative influence on inertia (coefficient = $-.181$, $t = -4.576$, $P < .001$). In contrast, switching was unrelated to inertia (coefficient = $.039$, $t = 0.859$, ns), and WOM even had a positive influence on inertia (coefficient = $.329$, $t = 6.463$, $P < .001$). These findings show that consumers considered complaining, that is, voicing one's discontent to the first party and requesting retribution, to be the "right" response to failed services. Right in the sense that the more customers complained, the less likely they are to experience inertia. Whether customers switched services or not was unrelated to inertia. Moreover, talking to others about the failed service was even considered a sign of inertia. We come back to these fascinating results in the Discussion.

7. Discussion

We have aimed to make a case for the "specific emotions" approach to model the impact of emotions on satisfaction and subsequent customer behaviors. For this purpose, we compared this new approach to the more traditional valence-based approach. Based on our current and previous research (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 1999), we conclude that insight in satisfaction and its related behaviors is enhanced considerably by using the specific emotions approach. We have found that the specific emotions, regret and disappointment, have a significant impact on these behaviors, even when the effects of satisfaction are accounted for.

The picture that emerges from our ongoing research on the impact of the specific emotions, regret and disappointment, on satisfaction and subsequent behavior is the following. Both emotions influence the extent to which customers are dissatisfied with the service provider, replicating the findings of Inman et al. (1997) and Taylor (1997). Satisfaction in turn influences the behaviors that

customers engage in, much as is assumed in the valence-based approach. Interestingly, in addition to this indirect influence, both regret and disappointment also have a more direct impact on behavior, much as is assumed in emotion theory and the related "specific emotions" approach. Below we address first the impact of regret and then that of disappointment.

7.1. Behavioral consequences of regret

Regret is directly related to switching behavior, both in the present data set and in our previous research (Zeelenberg et al., 2001). This is consistent with the fact that the experience of regret implies that there was a better alternative. Hence, it is likely that customers switch to this alternative provider next time they are in need of the service. Both our investigations also found that regret is unrelated to complaining. This ties in to the self agency aspect of regret. When regretful customers feel responsible for the bad experience ("I should have known better."), they are not likely to complain. The results for WOM are less consistent over the two studies. Whereas we found a small, though significant negative effect of regret on WOM in our previous study, we found a significant positive relation in the present study. This discrepancy may be due to the different samples used in the two studies. The fact, that the undergraduate students in our previous study were less likely to talk about an experience the more regret they felt, may simply reflect the social norms present in their peer group. It might be the case that students do not like to communicate their "failures" to others, and hence they may use WOM communication more as a self-presentation tool. For the majority of our present participants, a representative sample of the Dutch population, this motive of impression management is probably less salient. They may use WOM communication more as a venting mechanism. Future research on the different functions of WOM communication should reveal the validity of this reasoning. Interestingly, we also found that regret is uniquely related to inertia. We found that the more customers experience regret, the more inert they were. We return to this finding later in the Discussion.

7.2. Behavioral consequences of disappointment

The relation between disappointment and complaining was evident in both our investigations. This finding is in line with the fact that disappointment is felt in situations where others are responsible for the bad experience (e.g., Zeelenberg et al., 1998). When one holds the service provider responsible, it makes sense to file a complaint. Disappointment promoted WOM communication in the current data and in our previous research. This relationship is consistent with WOM being a venting mechanism and a means to gain sympathy from others, as was explained in the Introduction of this article. The final significant relation was between disappointment and switching. Although this relation was

not apparent in our previous research, it was expected that disappointment would cause customers to try to do better next time or to refrain from the service altogether.

The fact that specific emotions have an impact, even when satisfaction is accounted for, is an important finding that calls the need for more research on effects of specific emotions. We have limited our investigation to regret and disappointment, but as we already argued in the Introduction, many other emotions seem relevant in this context. A good example of such an emotion is that of anger. From introspection and everyday conversation, we know that anger is an emotion experienced often in response to failed service encounters. In the emotion literature, anger has been related to aggression and hostile behavior (e.g., [Averill, 1982](#); [Berkowitz, 1993, 1999](#)). In the case of services, anger may result in complaining and switching, but also in malicious attempts to hurt the service provider. Examples of this latter type of behavior would be intentionally spreading bad rumors about the service provider, or seeking publicity by writing letters to newspapers and customer organizations to openly complain about the service provider. It seems likely that these harmful behaviors are better predicted on the basis of customers' anger than on the basis of their overall dissatisfaction with the service. Research addressing the effects of such specific emotions will not only further our understanding of what customers will do when they are dissatisfied, but could also help firms to identify the specific problems with their services by means of more detailed surveying of customer emotions. This should ideally lead to managerial action to prevent dissatisfaction and the specific negative emotions from happening.

7.3. *The experience of inertia*

Now that we have discussed the main findings of the present research, we would like to draw attention to the results concerning customer inertia. We included this response in our survey since customers often fail to act when service encounters are dissatisfactory. This inertia could be caused by perceived difficulties of the behaviors (e.g., filing a complaint is often not easy) or due to simple cost/benefit reasoning in which the costs outweigh the benefits, but we also had reason to believe that emotions could contribute to inertia. Let us turn to the results.

This is the first study that explored customers' inertia in response to failed service encounters. We expected that inertia could be predicted on the basis of the emotional responses. While our model predicted customer inertia significantly, the amount of variance accounted for was only modest. Hence, we sought whether inertia simply expressed the overall lack of action by the customer, which would become evident from a negative relation between inertia with all the other behavioral responses. In this further analysis, we examined which behavioral responses lead to the experience of inertia in customer. The analysis suggests that in the mind of the customers, inertia does not simply

mean "doing nothing," but that it refers to not doing certain things. The results of the analysis were as follows: The more customers complained, the less they felt that they had been inert. But whether they had switched services or not was unrelated to inertia. Moreover, the more customers engaged in WOM communications, the more they referred to their behavior as inert. On the basis of this pattern of results, we now believe that customers' self-perception of inertia reflects the extent to which customers think they have acted on their dissatisfaction directly towards the service providing firm or organization. Only complaining seems to be able to provide the customer with the feeling of having engaged in the appropriate action. In other words, complaining is a refusal to accept the loss incurred by the failed service encounter and an attempt to achieve the original goal (in the face of obstruction). Customers turn to the service provider and actively try to undo the harm. Switching, a behavioral response that is very bad for the firm, does not seem to be considered as a behavior towards the service provider. Customers that switch seem to accept the current loss and cut potential future losses by leaving the relationship. The fact that WOM is even positively related to inertia implies that customers do have difficulty accepting the loss but do not take reparative action and stay. Actions do indeed speak louder than words.

Assuming that customers evaluate their inertia in response to a service failure negatively, there is a lot to be learned. Complaining is able to take away feelings of inertia; however, most dissatisfied customers do not complain. They do talk to others about their dissatisfaction. As in previous research (e.g., [Anderson, 1998](#); [Singh, 1988](#); [Zeelenberg and Pieters, 1999](#)), the incidence of complaining was low and the incidence of WOM was high in this nationally representative sample. These findings underscore the importance of stimulating dissatisfied customers to complain and voice their dissatisfaction directly to the firm. Although the importance of complaint soliciting is well known, our results on customer inertia indicate that voicing the complaint itself is already beneficial for customers, as it promotes an experience of having done something, a sense of control. The potential long-term benefits of this for customer loyalty are an issue for follow-up research.

7.4. *Emotions: dimensions or discrete categories?*

Taken together, the research reviewed and the new findings offered in this article demonstrate the usefulness of going beyond valence and focussing on specific emotions in consumer behavior research. Hence, it is appropriate to ask if this means that we should abandon the valence approach (or more generally the dimensional view of emotions) completely? The answer to this question is no. Not only has the dimensional approach proven to be useful in understanding the behavior of consumers, also our study shows that a simple valence-based construct as customer (dis)satisfaction is predictive of many behavioral conse-

quences (though much is to be gained by including specific emotions). Thus, it seems more appropriate to rephrase the question into: “Which of the two approaches leads to better insights into the role of emotions in consumer behavior” (see also Bagozzi et al., 2000)?

Lazarus (1991, pp. 59–68) summarizes the arguments in favor of each approach. The primary advantage of the dimensional view (of which the valence-based approach is a special case) is that it is a more parsimonious account of emotional experience. In many empirical studies, a few dimensions (positive vs. negative valence, but also intensity) capture a large portion of the variation in more specific emotion ratings. Moreover, experienced feelings are often not strong enough to produce full-fledged discrete emotions, different positive or negative emotions tend to occur simultaneously, and people may sometimes be able to discriminate between emotions only in terms of global dimensions such as valence or intensity. Proponents of the categorical view (from which the specific emotions approach emerged) seriously question these arguments and maintain that a dimensional approach provides little unique insights into emotions because these dimensions are universal dimensions of meaning. Furthermore, only a categorical approach can yield rich insights into the eliciting conditions, subjective feelings, and behavioral consequences of different emotions. This last argument of Lazarus expresses the central point of our current research effort: The focus on specific emotions provides better insight into the specific behaviors that consumers engage in.

An attempt to reconcile the dimensional valence approach and the categorical specific emotions approach was made by Frijda, and his views are especially relevant to our current concerns, namely, the behavioral effects of emotions. Frijda (1986, p. 256) argues that the two views focus on two different levels of the emotion process. “Emotions are discrete states when considered at the level of actual response readiness—at the level of particular action tendencies. They are states varying along a set of continuous dimensions, however, when considered at the level of response to the event’s valence and urgency.” An important issue for future research concerns the conditions under which a dimensional (valence-based) or categorical (specific emotions) view of emotions will be more useful in understanding the role of emotions in customer behavior. We have stressed the significance of the “specific emotions” approach when the interest lies in the specific behaviors that customers engage in. There will be situations where mere valence provides sufficient information to understand and predict the behavior or well being of customers. This is likely when affective reactions are not differentiated enough to warrant a categorical perspective (e.g., mood effects, atmospheric influences on purchase behavior, and in low involved decisions). Furthermore, if a situation evokes a mix of emotions (e.g., regret, disappointment, sadness, anger) or if the behavioral reactions tied to different emotions are similar (e.g., regret, disappointment, anger, and

sadness may all lead to avoiding the responsible service provider in the future), a dimensional approach could be sufficient. However, for now, our conclusion is that there is rich potential in exploring the behavioral consequences of specific emotions.

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